State services for such devolved functions." As such no time limit has been or can be prescribed for States to establish District level Panchayati Raj Administrative and Technical Services.

Administrative and Financial Powers for Panchayati Raj Institutions

†2781. SHRI BHAGWATI SINGH: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

the steps being taken by Government to arm Panchayati Raj institutions with administrative and financial powers;

whether it is a fact that certain State Governments have not taken appropriate measures for streamlining and empowering Panchayati Raj institutions; and

if so, the details of Government's schemes to encourage rural development through Panchayati Raj institutions as was envisaged by Gandhiji?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) In order to evolve a national consensus on the measures to be taken to strengthen Panchayati Raj and ensure that Panchayati Raj Institutions function as institutions of self-government, as envisaged in Part IX of the Constitution, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj convened Seven Round Tables of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj between July, 2004 and December, 2004. At the Round Tables, about 150 points for action, covering 18 dimensions of Panchayati Raj, were formulated by consensus. *Inter alia,* these cover points of action pertaining to both the Centre and the States, relating to the effective devolution of functions, funds and functionaries to Panchayats, strengthening Gram Sabhas, planning and implementation by Panchayats, reservations, implementation of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), Panchayat election, and revenue generation by Panchayats.

A Council of State Ministers of Panchayati Raj under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Panchayati Raj and a Committee of Chief Secretaries of States and State Panchayati Raj Secretaries under the Chairmanship of the Union Secretary (Panchayati Raj) have been

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

constituted to monitor the progress on the implementation of the 150 recommendation of the Seven Round Tables. During the meetings of the Council of State Ministers and Committee of Chief Secretaries, held between April, 2005 and April, 2006, the steps to be taken for devolution of funds, functions and functionaries, activity mapping, constitution of District Planning Committees, implementation of PESA, capacity building of elected members of Panchayats, IT enabled e-govemance at Panchayat level have been discussed with States.

With a view to interact with Panchayats and carrying out a review with authorities concerned of the progress in implementation the points for action mutually agreed to in the Round Tables, a process of visiting the States and UTs at the level of Union Minister for Panchayati Raj has been initiated. Twelve States and two Union Territories have been covered so far, including Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Chhatisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Goa, Sikkim.Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh. Each visit is concluded with a Statement of Conclusions jointly singned with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, laying out the points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables. Most of these action points revolve around follow up measures on activity mapping, matching transfer of funds and functionaries, creation of Panchayat sector in the State budget, constitution and operational guidelines for District Planning Committee within an agreed time frame.

An exercise is underway to review different statutes with a view to harmonise them with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitutions. Steps are also being taken to fill in critical gaps in infrastructure and capacity so that Panchayats can effectively fulfill their constitutional role. Ministry of Panchayati Raj had constituted an expert group to study and make recommendations on planning at grass root level. The report of the Group was submitted on 28.3.2006 and has been accepted by the Ministry. The Group has suggested an action plan for preparation of Xlth Five Year Plan through consolidation of plans at the Panchayat level. In consultation with the Planning Commission, the Ministry is working on the implementation of the recommendations in States.

The empowered Sub-Committee on Financial and Administrative Empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions, originally constituted on

recommendations of the National Development Council, has been reconstituted on 14th September, 2005, with the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj as the Chairperson and the Union Minister of RuraP Development added as a member of the Sub-Committee. The Terms of Reference of the Sub-Committee include, inter alia, working out the modalities for strengthening the financial domain of the PRIs through transfer of resources from the Centre and state governments; assessing the capacity of the PRIs to raise revenues and other resources and to develop an action plan in this regard; analyzing the capability of PRIs at different levels to absord the financial allocation made to the PRIs under different schemes; and to develop a framework to ensure fiscal discipline and financial accountability at different levels of PRIs.

Yes, sir. The performance across the States in taking appropriate measures for streamlining and empowering implementation has been uneven. The State Governments have to make greater efforts so that the Panchayats fully attain the status of "institutions of self government" as stipulated in Article 243 Gof Part-IX of the Constitution of India.

The guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Scheme are being reviewed to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in planning and implementation. As regards new Centrally Sponsored Schemes, wherever relevant, it is proposed to provide for a central role for Panchayats. Thus, for example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides for the Panchayats to be the "Principal authorities" for the planning and implementation of scheme under the Act. It is also the endeavor of Ministry of Panchayati Raj to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in the schemes under Bharat Nirman.

Steps for development of Panchayati Raj

2782. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

whether any major steps have been taken for further development of Panchayati Raj system in the country in the last two years; and

if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANISHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, sir. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj was set up on 27 May 2004. After the Ministry was set up, a Conference of Chief Ministers and